

Report of Corporate Director for People

**to
Cabinet
on
5th January 2016**

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Children's Services

**Adoption Service Annual Report and updated
Statement of Purpose**

Scrutiny Committee – People

Executive Councillor: Councillor Anne Jones

A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report on the activities of the Adoption Service, January – December 2015 and to review the updated Statement of Purpose in line with Standard 18.3 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Annual Report, as at appendix 1, is noted.
- 2.2 That the updated Statement of Purpose, as at appendix 2, is approved.

3. Background

- 3.1 The provision, standards and operations of the adoption service is governed by:
- The Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003 (updated 2005);
 - The Adoption Agencies regulations 2005 (updated 2013 & 2014);
 - The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (amendment) regulations 2011;
 - The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential amendments) Regulations 2012;
 - The Adoption Minimum Standards 2011.

- 3.2 National Minimum Standard 25.6 states that the Executive side of the Local Authority should:
- a) receive written reports on the management and outcomes of the agency twice a year;
 - b) monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users;
 - c) satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.
- 3.3 National Minimum Standard 18.3 required that that the Executive side of the Local Authority formally approves the Statement of Purpose and reviews it at least annually.
- 3.4 In January 2012, the adoption service was inspected and was deemed overall to be good. Future inspections will be as part of a wider social care framework.
- 3.5 In May 2012 the Government introduced an Adoption scorecard to more transparently monitor adoption standards across the country. Southend's performance against the scorecard continues to improve.
- 3.5 Southend continues to be better than the national average in all areas in particular in:
- Average time between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family
 - Average time between Placement Order and matching

Both of these areas are better than the national average, and they both fell slightly between the 2013 and 2014 scorecards. Southend has an on-going commitment to finding adoptive families for our children and the small numbers included in the figure, does mean that it is hard to judge levels from one year to the next.

Of those children placed since April 2015, who will begin to be reported as part of future scorecards the average time between Placement Order and Matching with adopters has reduced from 180 days to 117 and between entering care and being placed for adoption, from 380 to 329. This should therefore begin to show in the 2016 scorecard, although with several sibling groups for whom we have now successfully identified adoption placements we may still not reach an overall average as low as we would like.

- 3.7 From 1st September 2012 new regulations came into force in relation to Preferred Option decisions. These are no longer presented to the full adoption panel. It is now the sole responsibility of the Agency Decision Maker in consultation with the adoption medical advisor, independent panel advisor and legal representative. Southend reviewed its processes to ensure it was compliant with this new requirement. The Southend Adoption Decision Maker is John O'Loughlin, Head of Children's Services.

- 3.8 The grant funding which has been available for the past few years to support adoption will cease in March 2016. During 2015 however there have been two new grant funding streams introduced nationally for Post Adoption Support and more recently one year funding for some specific categories of inter-agency fee funding. It is unclear at this stage whether either of these funding streams will continue into 2016/17 and if so, whether local authority funding will be top sliced to fund the activity.

4. Other Options

- 4.1 There are no other options presented as it is a statutory requirement to present a report to the Executive twice yearly and to update the Statement of Purpose annually.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 The Annual Report provides one of the two reports required each year. The second report takes the form of an interim adoption report. This report came in September 2015.
- 5.1 The Adoption Statement of Purpose has been updated and requires cabinet approval.

6. Corporate Implications

- 6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

The Annual Report sets out the framework for the work of the Adoption Service. It provides evidence of the annual activity which directly supports the delivery of the Corporate Priority to 'Improve Outcomes for Vulnerable Children'.

- 6.2 Financial Implications

If the service does not work efficiently in recruitment and family finding, there could be a financial impact in the purchasing of adoptive families through the National Adoption register at a cost of £27,000 per placement. The impact of the Partners in Adoption consortium coming to an end in 2014 has not led overall to an increase in cost for Southend. There have however been huge changes in court outcomes nationally which are likely to have a financial impact in 2016/17 as there is a reduction in inter-agency activity with less children nationally being placed for adoption.

In addition, the national changes introduced in June 2015 in respect of Regional Adoption Agencies at this stage remain unclear as to financial or other impacts on local authorities.

- 6.3 Legal Implications

It is a statutory requirement to present a report to the Executive twice yearly and to update the Statement of Purpose annually.

6.4 People Implications

The 2 fixed term posts in adoption which were created using the adoption grant to support government priorities to assess more adopters and ensure a reduction in delay for children awaiting adoption will end in March 2016 with the cessation of grant funding.

With the potential changes in 2016/17 through the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies, it is unclear at this stage as to how adoption services will be delivered in future years and the Governance of this. This will become clearer over the next year.

6.5 Property Implications

None

6.6 Consultation

Consultation with adoptive and birth families and with adopted children about the work and delivery of the service takes place on a regular basis.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

The adoption service works within the East Anglian Consortium which covers a diverse geographical area and enables a wider choice of families for Looked after Children in Southend being placed for adoption. Sufficiency planning has identified the need to target families for children from Eastern European countries as well as those willing to adopt children with additional needs and those who are older at the point of placement.

6.8 Risk Assessment

No significant risks identified.

6.9 Value for Money

The Southend adoption service will achieve an estimated income generation of over £177,500 in 2015/16, however it is unclear at this time as the possibility of achieving this in future years, given the changes proposed in adoption service delivery.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

None

6.11 Environmental Impact

None

7. Background Papers

CMT briefing paper (attached) October 2015

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Adoption Service Annual report 2015

Appendix 1A: Adoption Scorecard December 2014

Appendix 2: Updated Statement of Purpose December 2015